

WITCHCRAFT:

IS IT

A REALITY OR A DELUSION?

BY H. L. HASTINGS.

There is perhaps no subject, concerning which wider differences of opinion exist among thinking people, than upon the subject of witchcraft. The possibility of the possession by human beings of spiritual, mysterious, supernatural, or magical powers is one of those matters concerning which there is great dispute. But whatever opinions may be held at the present time, it can hardly be denied that the majority of the human family, both wise and ignorant, civilized and savage, from remote ages to the present time, *have believed* in the existence, and the possible exercise of such mysterious and supernatural powers, and have attributed to certain persons the ability to obtain information, and perform acts, by the aid of occult or supernatural beings, which would otherwise entirely exceed the ordinary intelligence and ability of men. Whether the exercise of these powers be a reality or a pretence, many have in all ages believed it a reality, and to a considerable extent the same opinion still prevails, not only in the dark corners and among savage tribes of earth, but among those who claim high intelligence, and great intellectual advancement.

We need not go back to ancient days for examples of oracles, or of persons claiming ability to deal with these mysterious and unseen powers. The instances of such pretensions are abundant, notwithstanding the detection of numerous impositions and deceptions; and there has been a sufficient amount of evidence of reality in such performances to insure their perpetuation up to the present time, in spite of all enlightenment and advancement. Law and force have failed to expel them from the world, and progress and science seem equally ineffective.

One of the standing themes for skeptical sneering has been the alleged belief of the Christian Church in witchcraft, and the persecutions which have resulted therefrom. But to-day a large proportion of the skeptical world are firm in the faith that just such things are possible as the believers in old-time witchcraft contended did occur, and so while sneering at the idea of "witches" and similar "superstitions" of Christian people, they are at the same time consulting spiritual mediums, precisely as people in the olden time consulted witches, sorcerers, and necromancers. There are changes of circumstances, resulting from the power of Christianity and education, but the things which sorcerers claimed to do hundreds of years ago, spiritual mediums profess to do now; and as in those times investigation was baffled by powers so mysterious that they could not be traced, so to-day science is equally at fault, and equally unable to solve the mysteries of spirit intercourse; and those most skeptical regarding Christianity are often most credulous concerning spiritual manifestations; those who have denied the possibility of a supernatural revelation, having revelations of their own every day, and those who have disbelieved in all miracles, finding miracles as plenty as blackberries, and as cheap.

The history of past ages is full of weird and fantastic

tales regarding the professors and practitioners of the black art; but though we now hear of no leagues and bargains made with the great Arch Enemy of mankind, yet it is well understood that in order to become a "medium" for spirit communication, will, judgment, and conscience must be totally *subordinated* to these dominating powers, and the results of this subjugation may prove quite as serious as the results of any old time compact with the powers of evil, though the accounts given may be lacking in the grotesqueness and dramatic interest of the witch stories of by-gone years.

If there be no reality in *any* of these mysterious manifestations, it will not be an easy matter to account for this almost universal belief. If the subject is one to be dismissed with a joke or a sneer, how comes it that it has utterly refused to be thus disposed of, and has held sway over the minds of men from the remotest ages and remotest lands, and still holds sway over vast portions of the human family? Undoubtedly it has often been mingled with great and gross superstitions among barbarous people; but the mysteries which were so puzzling to the ignorant have not yet been mastered by the learned, and while scientific research and careful investigation dispose of vast quantities of the rubbish of imposition and legerdemain, there yet remains a residuum of mystery and marvel which is insoluble thus far, and which may perhaps be regarded as a nucleus of reality around which flourishes a nebulous haze of mystery, trickery, imposition, and fraud.

It is not easy to believe that the world both savage and civilized, heathen and Christian, have for thousands of years been entirely misled in their belief in the possibility of mortal men and women having communication with spirits, or invisible beings of a different order; nor

that legislators, judges, governors, princes, rulers, and ecclesiastics, have been utterly mistaken when they have endeavored to resist and uproot such practices among the people; nor that all the believers in modern Spiritualism are equally deluded and in the dark regarding the very corner-stone of their theory; nor that all the savage and barbarous nations are utterly mistaken in every instance, when they affirm the existence and manifestation of unseen intelligences. If ancient history is true, spirit manifestations were believed to be real. If modern history is true, spirit manifestations are still a reality to a large portion of the human family; and if the writings of travelers are true, then this practice though existing in civilized and enlightened lands, is not confined to them, but is found in its full blown vigor in the dark corners of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty, and throughout a world which lieth in the grasp of the Wicked One.

No candid person will be likely to deny that a very large proportion of the phenomena claimed as supernatural are pure and simple fraud, deception and imposition, contrived by craft and imposed upon credulity, for purposes of personal advantage. But he would be a bold man who should affirm that all these manifestations without exception were of the same character; that all who believe in and practice these arts are either fools or knaves; and that legislators and kings and prophets have all been fighting for ages against powers which had no existence, and which, nevertheless, survive all the efforts made for their extermination.

The more cautious and candid opinion would seem to be that there must be some reality as the basis for all this deception and fraud, and that there must be instances where manifestations occur of such mysterious and

unaccountable character as to afford some justification for this wide-spread opinion concerning the existence of invisible intelligences.

It is impossible within our prescribed limits to enter into details or accumulate facts fully illustrating this general subject. The literature is too vast for examination,—the field is too wide for exploration; but thoughtful and well informed persons will hardly fail to recall some instances which may serve to illustrate the points under consideration. One thing, however, is worthy of note: the ultimate malignancy, and the disastrous tendency of all these manifestations; and this, notwithstanding their apparent harmlessness or triviality at the beginning. For, though the consultation of such spirits may commence in comedy, it ends in tragedy; though in its beginning it may seem both innocent and beneficent, its endings are draped with the shadows of crime, disaster, madness, and despair.

From the magicians of Egypt, buried with Pharaoh's host in the bottom of the Red Sea; from the incantations of Balaam ending in his own destruction; from the spirit-mediums of Babylon and Nineveh, who, with their enchantments perished in the wreck of the nations which they deluded; from the story of the apostate Saul, going from the presence of a spirit medium at Endor to fill a suicide's grave; from the history of Cræsus and numerous others down to Napoleon III, who consulted and followed these false guides to their own discomfiture and ruin; from the multitudes of demoniacs who now in heathen lands, as anciently in Palestine, wander helpless and hopeless, maddened and demented; from the prominent spirit-mediums who, wrecked in health and ruined in mind and morals, have gone to mad-houses; from the graves of those who have died in frantic agony,

or who have met the suicide's fate ; from the defeated commanders, and the fallen rulers who have put their trust in these mysterious powers, down to the deluded followers of those "unclean spirits like frogs," which are to marshall the hosts of evil for the war of the great day of God Almighty, and lead them on to utter and final defeat,—from all these examples of the baleful influence and disastrous outcome of dealings with these mysterious powers, comes a warning which no wise person should despise, which no prudent person should disregard, but which should cause all persons to shrink back from taking the first step into a path which leads to such awful chasms, such deadly pitfalls and abysses, as those into which persons who have dabbled in such mysteries have so often plunged.

In view of the deceptions and disasters which follow the practice of such occult arts, it cannot be a matter of surprise that the power of law has been from time to time invoked to prevent the evils and the crimes which so often result from such forbidden practices ; and the fact that the execution of such laws has often been attended by horrible barbarities, only indicates that the same powers of evil which lead astray the votaries of magic and witchcraft, may also so insinuate themselves into other quarters as to influence rulers and governors, produce panic, and so give rise to the grossest injustice and the most cruel barbarities under the forms of law, and for the suppression of spiritual intercourse.

The legendary tales of old women riding broom-sticks, and of ghosts and goblins and black cats, may serve to amuse the careless and lull the unthinking into indifference, but the awful facts of history and experience furnish matter for the more serious meditations of those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to understand,

And who can point out any essential difference between the stories of witches riding on broomsticks through the air, and the accounts of spirit mediums floating in ether, or being borne around the room on tables suspended in space? What special difference is there between persons binding themselves in allegiance to Satan at some witch-dance in the forest, and spirit mediums attending a *seance* in a darkened room, where the first condition of and pre-requisite for mediumship is an absolute yielding of body and soul, will and mind, to the control of unseen and unknown spirits?

There are those who never cease to deride that law which says, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," as cruel, tyrannous, and unreasonable. But it is well for people to know what they are talking about; and when they do they may learn that the occult and devilish practices of necromancy not only tended to immorality, disease, insanity, and death, as they do now; but that anciently the diviners or "mediums" and their followers, were often guilty of the most abominable and horrible crimes and barbarities, which were a sufficient cause for prohibiting such practices under the heaviest penalties; and this not only among Jews and Christians, but among Romans and people of other nationalities, whose laws were quite as severe as those of Moses. Under Pagan Roman Law those practicing these magical arts were liable to be burned alive. Those who consulted them were punished with crucifixion, and to own books upon these subjects was counted a criminal offence.

The Church of Rome inherited these traditions of punishment. They did not take them from the *Law of Moses* nor from the *gospel of Christ*, but from the laws and usages of the ancient Roman Commonwealth, which found in these infamous and dangerous rites quite enough

criminality to call for some energetic action on the part of the civil government.

The practice of murdering women, to secure the blood of their unborn children for these horrible incantations, was not calculated to make the path of the Spiritualists of those days very smooth.

THE CASE OF GILLES DE RAIS,

a marshall of France, a gentleman of wealth, intelligence, and culture; and of his chief magician, Francesco Prelati, a spiritual medium or necromancer, is in point. For eight years, from 1432 to 1440, when he was hung and then burned, Gilles de Rais gave himself up to sorcery, necromancy, and unnatural lusts. His "medium," Prelati, to propitiate his offended demon or familiar spirit, once called for an offering "in a glass vessel" of "a child's hand, heart, eyes and blood. These were duly furnished by Gilles de Rais, but failed to propitiate the offended demon. The number of children murdered by these wretches during those eight years, for magical purposes, or to secure their silence after the indulgence of unnatural lusts, can never be known. Some writers estimated them *at seven or eight hundred*; the civil process accused Gilles de Rais of murdering *over two hundred*; and in the articles of accusation in the ecclesiastical court, *after careful investigation*, the figure given is "*one hundred and forty*, more or less." In his confession the wretch said he had kept no count, but that the number was great. The corroborative confession of Prelati, the necromancer, is full of details about necromancy, or the consultation of the dead; and Gilles de Rais said, he himself had confessed "*enough to put ten thousand men to death.*"*

*See H. C. LEA's History of the Inquisition. Vol. iii. pp. 468-488.

Is it surprising that all lovers of public order, and all civil and religious rulers, should endeavor to put an end to consultation with demons which led to such barbarities? Is it wonderful that with mothers weeping for their murdered children, an awful horror of such practices should take possession of the public mind?

We who live in lands enlightened by the gospel, know but little what Spiritualism is or of what it does. The ancient Romans, like the heathen nations at the present day, had far better opportunities for studying the phenomena of Spiritualism pure and simple, than are enjoyed by scientific or unscientific people in lands where the Word of God is proclaimed, where the name of Christ is adored, where men have been trained and educated under Christian influences, and to some degree in accordance with Christian principles. The helpless savages in Central Africa and in other heathen lands, who have been slaughtered by thousands at the beck of tyrants controlled and directed by spiritual mediums, sorcerers, and magicians, have far better facilities for judging as to the real character of spiritual communications, than are enjoyed by persons living in lands where the light of Christian truth banishes these demons like owls and bats at noon-day, into the dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty.

Hence it is not a matter of great surprise that the early settlers of America, living two hundred years nearer than we to those days of darkness when Spiritualism had free course; and before the memories of the barbarities of such men as Gilles de Rais and his compeers had utterly faded from recollection; should view with dismay the fresh manifestations of malign spiritual influence which seemed to be sweeping in upon the land whither they had come to make their home in the wilderness;

and nothing would be more natural than that the evil spirits which had commenced these operations should create a panic and thus bring discredit upon Christianity and the Word of God by unauthorized punishments inflicted upon guiltless persons. As the sin of David is known and published on the house-tops by thousands who have no word of condemnation for rulers and nations the dead level of whose daily depravity was far lower than the horrible pit into which the Psalmist fell, and from which he was rescued by divine mercy; and as the burning of one man in Geneva,—Michael Servetus,—has sometimes provoked more criticism and reproach than the massacre of St. Bartholomew's eve, the slaughter of the Waldenses and Albigenses, the horrors of the Inquisition, the fires of the *Auto da Fe*, or even the murder of more than a million of people in France during the Reign of Terror, so the execution of twenty persons for

WITCHCRAFT, IN SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS,

in 1692, though conducted under the provisions of English Law, and with less cruelty and barbarity than was usual in Europe or in Ancient Rome, will doubtless be harped upon by the same class of controversialists to the end of time, as an instance of Puritan barbarity, while the atrocities of *Gilles de Rais*, the wide-spread slaughter of sorcerers in ancient Rome, the bulls of Popes against witchcraft, and the witch hunts of the middle ages will be conveniently relegated to oblivion.

Nor are such persons content with a statement of the actual facts in the case.

Not long since a southern member of Congress stood up in his place and accused the Puritans of New England of *burning* witches at Salem. The same false accusation occurred in a fourth of July oration delivered in the

city of Boston in 1892, by the mouth-piece of those exiles of Erin who have lately managed the affairs of that city, and under whose benign administration, within the last decade, the writer and several others have been heavily fined, and locked in Charles street jail, for reading the Bible and preaching the gospel to the poor on Boston Common.

It is sadly true that twenty persons were put to death in Salem for witchcraft in 1692, the death of the last one occurring Sept. 19. But it is also true that most of those concerned in the Salem witch-trials, including the accusers, the leading prosecutors, and officials generally, soon after acknowledged their grievous error and sin, in their hasty and unwarrantable course; and in 1703 Governor Joseph Dudley signed an order, in accordance with a report of a committee of the General Assembly, for the payment of thousands of dollars of damages (£570, 12s.), to various persons who had been prosecuted for witchcraft, in the year 1692. The Puritans were not infallible then; they have learned something since. But *two hundred years later*, a dispatch from Lima Peru, dated Sept. 10th, 1892, stated that the Rev. Father Celedonie Vargas, with two accomplices, was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment for the crime of

PUBLICLY BURNING AN INDIAN GIRL,

Benigna Huaman, as a *witch*, in the village of Bambamarca, Feb. 20, 1888. The girl was accused of causing, through witchcraft, the death of a certain man named Echeverria.

The condition of things in Salem in 1692 is thus described by Chandler Robbins, in his *History of the Second Church in Boston*. pp. 106-107.

“An alarming excitement was prevailing in Salem and

its vicinity. A large and continually increasing number of people complained that they were preternaturally vexed and tortured. They exhibited all the marks of real suffering. They kept the town in disturbance by their strange actions and sudden outcries. They insisted that their tormentors were spectres, exactly resembling certain living men and women, whom they described. They declared that these spectral tormentors tendered them a book, in the devil's name, to sign or touch, in token of allegiance; and, if they refused, redoubled their tortures. So great became the agitation and disorder, so importunate the outcries of the victims, so manifold their apparent sufferings, and so reiterated their charges against the individuals, whom the spectres personated, that the magistrates were compelled to take cognizance in the matter. They must do something to put a stop to these alarming evils. They proceeded to an investigation. The afflicted, being examined, testified to the reality of their calamities. Being confronted with the persons whom they accused, they would immediately swoon, or fall into convulsions, from which the touch of no other hands than those of the accused themselves could restore them; but, when touched by them, they immediately revived. Moreover, as if under the influence of a mysterious fascination or sympathy, they would imitate all the motions of the accused, and obey their gestures, though apparently too distant to observe them. The magistrates were puzzled. The whole country was in confusion. The General Court was able to transact little business, and adjourned, on the account of the commotion, from the second day of July to the second Wednesday in October. A general panic seized all classes. The wisest men in the country were at first carried away with the excitement. They all believed in witchcraft and

commerce with the devil, even those who afterwards wrote most strongly against the hard things done in the trials; and they thought that the present were cases of real possession. They all, too, felt the necessity of vigorous measures of some kind, to relieve the country, if possible, from the sore calamity that had fallen upon it. What shall be done? The seven judges tried and condemned one,—who was executed,—and then hesitated. The cases multiplied. The jails were overflowing with the accused. ‘What shall be done?’ was the question that passed from mouth to mouth. At this stage, Cotton Mather made a proposal far more characteristic of him than ambition or cruelty. He offered, *that, if the possessed people who were under accusation might be scattered far asunder, he would singly provide for six of them, and see whether, without more bitter methods, prayer with fasting would not put an end to these heavy trials.* This offer was refused, as we might suppose; for all men had not the same faith as our pastor in those remedies. But that he was in earnest in his offer is evident, not only from the general tones of his opinions and practice, but also from the fact that he himself, during the witchcraft trials, spent a day almost every week in secret fasting and prayer. But the matter was now in the courts; and through the courts it must go, and by the courts be decided.”

A FUNDAMENTAL ERROR

of the persons concerned in the Salem witch hunt, was the acceptance of the then current theory of the connection between church and state; a theory which had numerous adherents then, as it has still in countries which are largely under priestly domination. Law and gospel, government and religion, are both necessary to man; but

they are not identical. The law of Moses, established for the orderly government of a nation which, emerging from bondage, had neither laws nor organization, has often been confounded and compared with the gospel of Christ, which was a message of mercy and salvation, confined to no land, nation, or people, but sent forth to every creature; and to nations which were already fully organized and sufficiently provided with legal enactments. Such a message of good news would naturally and necessarily avoid all political complications, and all interference with governments and national affairs; consequently the New Testament contains no directions for the conduct of rulers, kings, or governors, but aims to effect the renovation of individual men, who, through the renewing of the spirit of their minds, are transformed into the likeness of Christ, their Lord and Head. Hence while the Jewish religion was intimately and necessarily interlinked and interwoven with civil government, and could only be properly practiced in a limited territory, governed by the Mosaic law; the gospel of Christ, designed for all nations, kindreds, tongues, peoples, lands, and climes, is as necessarily separated from governmental influence and interference; the church of Christ being pilgrims and strangers on earth, and having no call to undertake the control of governmental affairs.

The condition of the settlers of New England was peculiar. Holding firmly their religious faith, and coming to a land where no government existed, they had to face the problems of both religion and government. And in discarding the barbarous code of England, whence they came, where capital crimes have been reckoned by scores and hundreds, and adopting in the main the Mosaic code, which only recognizes seventeen capital crimes, which number they somewhat diminished, they greatly

ameliorated the pressure of law and government upon the individual. But they nevertheless found themselves involved in the most grave and serious difficulties, in their efforts to establish an ideal church and government, composed of men who were not "ideal." Consequently they were ill-equipped for the administration of either law or gospel, and the whole proceedings in the cases of the persons accused of witchcraft at Salem, indicated ignorance of the first principles of evidence and justice; whatever may have been the character of the manifestations with which they dealt.

There may have been some genuine cases of witchcraft in Salem; but in most cases the proceedings were based upon the accusations of little girls, who claimed to be tormented by certain persons whom they designated, and who were accused and condemned without legal proof. "Children were the accusers in nearly every instance; children were the afflicted, and children were the principal witnesses. Little Ann Putnam testified in nineteen cases, Elizabeth Hubbard in twenty, Mary Walcott in sixteen, Mary Warren in twelve, Mercy Lewis in ten, Susan Sheldon and Elizabeth Booth in eight each."*

Probably the devil had more to do with the witch hunt than the witchcraft, both of which were carried on contrary to the gospel of Christ and the law of Moses. All that the Saviour did to persons afflicted with evil spirits was to *cast the spirits out*. Under Moses' law the practice of witchcraft was forbidden under pain of death; but no person could be condemned for any crime without the testimony of two or three witnesses. But in many of the cases in Salem, there was no proper evidence that witchcraft was practiced, and most of the persons accused and condemned utterly denied and repudiated all

* *Witchcraft in Salem Village*, p. 244.

connection with such forbidden practices. Nevertheless infidelity has for a generation rung the changes upon the connection between Christianity and the Salem witch hunt. A work on "*Witchcraft in Salem Village in 1692*," by Winfield S. Nevins, published in Boston, in 1892, after speaking of some misapprehensions about the connection of Rev. Mr. Parris with the sad transactions at Salem Village, says:

"Even more has Cotton Mather's position been misunderstood and misinterpreted. He and his father, Increase Mather, were conservative in all matters relating to the witchcraft prosecutions after they began. Cotton Mather has been charged with 'getting up' the delusion at Salem Village, and being the chief agent of the mischief, and helping it on throughout that dark summer. On the contrary, he was *not present at a single trial, and was at only one execution*. . . . Mr. Mather advised the judges and counsel to *exercise great care*, and not to convict on spectral evidence alone." p. 240. "Gov. Phips wrote on February 21st, 1693, that the advice given by the Mathers and other ministers, for *more caution* in the admission of evidence, had *much lessened the peril of conviction*." . . .

"Mr. Mather's plan for dealing with people supposed to be bewitched, was to *pray with them*, not to prosecute the persons whom they accused of being their tormentors. He seems to have been as successful with his remedy as the judges were with theirs. He prayed with the Goodwin children, and with their alleged tormentors. That outbreak was *checked in the family where it originated*, and no lives were then sacrificed beyond that of Mrs. Glover. Perhaps if Mather had been as active in the Salem witchcrafts as some of his detractors allege, he would have been the means of saving the lives that were

sacrificed to the law, and the ill-timed activity of Parris, Noyes, Hale, and the court." pp. 242-243.

It is true that the governor and council asked advice of the clergy of Boston, and this advice was given in a paper drawn up by Cotton Mather, which recommends "a very critical and exquisite caution" in conducting the prosecutions, and that all proceedings be managed with "an exceeding tenderness to the accused." In the examinations, "as little noise, company, and openness as possible," should be allowed, and no tests of doubtful lawfulness should be employed. It recommends "the speedy and vigorous prosecutions of such as have rendered themselves obnoxious, according to the directions given in the laws of God, and the *wholesome statutes of the English nation*." In other words Cotton Mather was a law-abiding citizen; and the laws and rules under which they acted were established and unquestioned. "In Scotland," says Hutchinson, in his *History of Massachusetts*, Vol. ii., chap. 1, "seven were executed for witches in 1697, upon the testimony of one girl about eleven years old. More witches have been put to death in a single county in England, in a short space of time, than have ever suffered in New England, altogether from first to last."

In convicting persons of witchcraft upon "spectral evidence," that is, upon the testimony of the afflicted that they were tormented by spectres or apparitions, invisible to others, but visible to the sufferers, and bearing the likeness of the persons whom they accused of having bewitched them, the Salem magistrates were probably justified by English law, and the practice of European tribunals; and they were assisted in the conduct of these trials in Salem by Mr. Newton as King's Attorney, who came from England and attended the trials, and afterwards went to New York; and it appears that the legal

proceedings were in accord with English law and the judicial precedents and decisions.

But against the whole business of spectral evidence which was held to be valid by the highest judges in English courts, Cotton Mather, with other leading New England ministers resolutely set his face. In the case of Margaret Rule, who was taken with strange fits in the public assembly; she suffered as others had, and believed herself assaulted by eight cruel spectres. She imagined that she knew three or four of them, but they came with faces covered. She was *cautioned not to mention their names*; but she privately named them to Mr. Mather. "They were," he says, "a sort of wretches, who for many years have gone under as violent presumptions of witchcraft, as perhaps any persons yet living upon earth, though I am far from thinking that the visions of this young woman were evidence enough to prove them so."* After the Salem executions he wrote in his diary: "I was always afraid of proceeding to convict or condemn any person as a confederate with the afflicting demons, upon so feeble an evidence as a spectral representation. Accordingly I *protested against it both publicly and privately*, and in my letters to the judges, I particularly besought them that they would by no means admit it; and when a considerable assembly of ministers gave in their advice about the matter, I not only concurred with them, but it was *I who drew it up*."

Cotton Mather pointed out to the magistrates the extreme danger of convicting on spectral evidence, from the fact that evil spirits might personate those innocent, as well as those guilty of commerce with them; and hence the innocent might suffer through satanic malice and strong delusion.

*Marvin's *Life and Times of Mather*. p. 137.

The fact of these persons being troubled, distressed, and assailed by mysterious powers might be undisputed and indisputable, but that fact was no evidence that the persons on whom the blame was laid were responsible for this evil condition of things; and it would seem entirely consistent with satanic witchcraft and malice to cause the innocent to suffer for things of which they were not guilty, while evil spirits guided the whirlwind of excitement and rode upon the storm. But notwithstanding all Mather said and did, he writes: "The mad people through the country reviled me as if I had been the doer of all the hard things that were done in the prosecutions of the witchcraft."

The English Statutes had for generations made enchantments and witchcraft felony; and these had been confirmed and illustrated by the decisions of distinguished judges in English courts, until the whole mode of procedure was established as described in "Dalton's Justice," which was the accepted legal guide in the provincial courts. "Under these laws, and the decisions of the English courts in accordance with them, it is stated on good authority, that there was an average of *one hundred and fifty executions* for witchcraft per annum, for *two hundred years*, or *thirty thousand in all*. These facts were known in New England before Cotton Mather was born."*

There are many people who could they see to-day the phenomena witnessed in New England two centuries ago, the tortures, torments, spasms, and contortions which were endured by the helpless victims; the manifestations of intelligence, fear, and anxiety which were exhibited in many cases by young children, as well as by others, would have little difficulty in believing that some

**Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, by Abijah P. Marvin, p. 115.

supernatural power was engaged in tormenting and afflicting these persons; and if Massachusetts had not now ten lunatic asylums, where demented, distracted, and violent persons could be promptly secluded from view, it is possible that witchcraft or spiritualism might furnish as many victims and exhibit as many sad phenomena in Massachusetts to-day as it did two hundred years ago.

In speaking of the case of the eldest girl of the Goodwin family, fourteen years old, who, with two other children, some six or eight years of age, suffered tortures, torments, contortions, spasms, in a manner which baffled both the ministers and the physicians of Boston, and who after being taken into Mather's own house and carefully and tenderly treated was recovered from the visitation through the prayers of the people of God; Cotton Mather, when describing the case in detail said after the last paroxysm had passed and she was free, "All my library never gave me any commentary on those paragraphs of the gospels which speak of demoniacs, equal to that which the passions of this child have given me."

"The story would not be complete without adding that the oldest girl lived to be the mother of a family and a respectable member of one of the churches of Boston, and that she always affirmed that the troubles of her girlhood were real, and not the work of a cunning and mischievous disposition."*

Cotton Mather's remedy for bewitched persons was separation, attention to diet, kind treatment, and earnest prayer. This was what he advised, this was what he practiced, and thus in his own house, persons were recovered from the affliction.

Notwithstanding all this, it is probable that we shall never hear the last of Christians persecuting the Salem

* *Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, p. 126.

witches; and Cotton Mather, who living a day's journey from Salem, never attended the trial of one of them, and who counselled moderation, and who himself prayed with and for persons who were afflicted and accused, instead of prosecuting them, will be cursed to the end of time as one of the instigators of a witch hunt; by persons who to-day are *firm believers in*, and *practicers of* the necromantic arts, which, for ages, in civilized countries, both heathen and Christian, have been deemed criminally dangerous, and worthy of repression by the strong arm of the law. Undoubtedly Cotton Mather believed in the possibility of communication with unseen spirits, and wrote in advocacy of that belief. The world believed it, and with a few exceptions the world believes it still. All Spiritualists believe it; and a recent writer in the *Century Magazine* says, "Witchcraft is at the present time believed in by a majority of the citizens of the United States." Indeed the learned English jurist and eminent commentator on law, Sir William Blackstone, who died as late as 1780, wrote, "To deny the actual existence of witchcraft and sorcery, is at once flatly to contradict the revealed Word of God and the testimony of every nation in the world." But a reference to Salem witchcraft, by persons who are themselves constantly seeking communion with invisible spirits, is a very convenient device for throwing dust in the eyes of the unthinking, thus enabling the deceived and deluded to pursue their course unchallenged and unhindered.

It may be proper to refer to the case of one man, Giles Corey, accused of witchcraft, who refused to plead to the indictment, probably knowing that if convicted his property would be forfeited. For nearly three hundred years, since the early part of the reign of Henry IV., the penalty for "standing mute," or refusing to plead to an

indictment, was that the prisoner be "put into a low, dark chamber, and there be laid on his back on the bare floor naked, unless where decency forbids, that there be placed upon his body as great a weight of iron as he could bear, that he have no sustenance, save only on the first day, three morsels of the worst bread, and on the second day, three draughts of standing water that should be nearest the prison door, and in this situation this should be alternately his daily diet till he died, or—as anciently the judgment ran,—till he answered."*

This being the common law of England, and so binding in Salem, Giles Corey was thus dealt with, *not* for witchcraft, but for refusing to plead when indicted. And he could have been relieved from this punishment at once had he pleaded "not guilty." Of course all this was horribly barbarous; but it was good English law, and though this was the only known instance in which this penalty was ever inflicted in New England or the United States, yet a case occurred in England *twenty-four years later*, in 1726, and it was not till about eighty years later, in the reign of King George III., that this barbarous punishment was abolished;† and it was not until about 1829 that a law was passed in England providing that when an indicted person "stood mute" and refused to plead, a plea of "not guilty" should be entered for him.

Barbarous as were the usages of those times, and cruel as were the methods of procedure, the practice in New England was undoubtedly a distinct improvement on the usages of the preceding generation. Cruel and unusual punishments were discarded. No one was subjected to the torture of the rack, the thumb-screw, or the iron

*Chitty's *Blackstone*, Vol. iv. p. 265. Stephen's *History of the Criminal Law*, Vol. i. p. 297.

† 12. *George III.* c. 20.

collar. No one was broken on the wheel, or drawn and quartered. No one was starved to death, no one was burned alive. The proceedings in Salem Village were open and above-board, and in accordance with existing laws and precedents. There were no sudden disappearances, secret imprisonments, midnight examinations and tortures in subterranean dungeons, as in the cases of the 341,021 poor wretches who, according to the estimate of Llorente,* formerly secretary of the Inquisition, were imprisoned, burned, burned in effigy, or subjected to severe penances, by the Spanish Inquisition, between its establishment in 1481, and its suppression by Napoleon in 1808. The "thirty-six kinds of torture" described by Meyer, were European, not American. Salem has a museum, but it does not contain "Instruments of Torture," such as are in the Tower of London, the museums of Munich, Ratsibon, Nuremburg, the Hague, and elsewhere.

No future excavators cutting a new street in Salem, will find—as the Spanish workmen did in the spring of 1870 when cutting through the Quemadero, or "burning place," in Madrid,—long black strata or layers of ashes, mingled with half burnt human bones, bits of rusted chains, iron staples, nails, melted lead, human hair, bony hands clasped as in prayer and transfixed with a huge nail, or ribs of victims with a spear thrust through them. No future traveler in New England will stand "breast deep in the ashes of the martyrs," as did Dr. H. Grattan Guinness, in Madrid, when the workmen had accidentally cut through that awful hillock—the memorial of the Spanish Inquisition and the burning of its helpless

*Llorente's *History of the Inquisition*, p. 583. London, 1827. The numbers given by *La Bandera Catolica*—the *Catholic Banner*.—published in Barcelona, Spain, July 29, 1883, are as follows: Burned alive, 35,534. Burnt in effigy, 18,637. Condemned to other punishments, 293,533.—General total. **347,704.** The same paper says, referring to the burning of a large number of Gospels in Barcelona: "The re-establishment of the Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition, must soon take place. . . What a day of pleasure will that be for us, when we see free-masons, spiritualists, free-thinkers, and the anti-clericals, writhing in the flames of the Inquisition."

victims.* No revolution in New England will open the doors to chambers such as were opened in the Inquisition buildings in Mexico and Pueblo in 1857, where within the hollow whited walls were found secret cells from which were brought out the dried up bodies of men who had been walled up alive in their clothes and their chains, and left to starve and die; and whose shrivelled bodies were now dragged forth, photographs of them being made, one of which lies before me as I write: none of these horrors have blackened New England soil.

It is easy for those who have inherited without labor the blessings which the early settlers of New England won amid conflicts, privations, toils and tears, to kick down the ladder on which they have climbed up, and to sneer at the narrowness, superstition, and intolerance of those heroic men, who with all their faults were generations in advance of their age; but it is not so easy to imitate their virtues, nor reach the results which they attained. Coming from lands where luxury, aristocracy, royalty and tyranny prevailed, and where intemperance, ignorance, impiety and crime were common, they, under circumstances of the greatest difficulty, established a new order of things. What was the result? A preacher to the Parliament, in company with the assembly of divines in Westminster, publicly said that he "had lived in a country *seven years*, in which time he *never saw a beggar, nor a man overcome with strong drink, nor did ever hear a profane oath*. What happy country was it think you? *It was New England.*"†

But it was not the New England of to-day, where infidels from platform and pulpit mock at the faith of their fathers; where skeptics denounce Salem witchcraft scares,

**The City of the Seven Hills*, pp. vii. 118-123,-272.

†*Life and Times of Mather*, p. 376.

and patronize spirit mediums with their seances and trances; where representatives of the highest culture are 'liberal' enough to praise both pilgrims and polygamists; where distillers are pouring out cargoes of Rum for benighted Africa; where prize-fighters get ten column reports in the newspapers, and diamond belts presented by city officials, while out-door preachers of the gospel get fines and imprisonment in the common jail; where *nine-tenths* of the salaries and wages paid by the city are drawn by men born in Ireland or by their families; where foreign rum sellers, foreign drunkards, and foreign ecclesiastics, aided by office seeking patriots, foster these evils, and fatten on the spoils of a plundered people, and where tens of thousands of arrests for drunkenness occur in a single city in a single year;—these are the changed aspects of New England life which confront the degenerate sons of noble sires, who tell what they think of their ancestors very freely, but who have never taken time to consider what their ancestors would think of them.

For such wrongs spiritualism and witchcraft with all their boasted progress, offer no remedy. Nothing but the word of the living God can banish these evils from the land. And wherever that word is unknown, there spiritualism and demonism prevail. Africa, China, India, and the islands of the sea, are saturated with their abominations; and they were not simply the errors of by-gone ages, but are existing *to-day* in all the dark corners of the earth; for Modern Spiritualism is simply modern heathenism, modified by the presence of Christian institutions and the elevating influence of Christian civilization.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A HINDU EX-MEDIUM.

I have before me a volume of 411 pages in the Marathi language, published at Bombay in 1888, entitled "*Arunodaya: The Autobiography of Bāba Padmanjī*,

containing a description of his former life as a Hindu, and the causes which led to his conversion." His motto is from John Newton: "I am not what I ought to be; I am not what I wish to be; I am not what I hope to be; but by the grace of God I am not what I once was."

The Author, born in 1831 of a wealthy and honorable family, is widely known as an accurate Sanscrit, Marhatta, and English scholar, an author of numerous valuable books, such as *A Marathi Grammar*, *A Marathi and English Dictionary*, *A Manual of Hinduism*, *A History of the Marhattas*, *Translations of the Vedas*, and various valued contributions to the current literature of India.

From this interesting Autobiography a friend translates the following extracts, which will give some idea of the prevalence of Spiritualism among the Hindus.

"Once a woman from Bombay came to the house of my maternal grandmother and remained several days. She was possessed by eight devils. I cannot now remember the names of all these eight, but some of them were as follows: Padshawanthi, Bapadeva, Cherdea, etc. These spirits used to demand goats' flesh, fowl, liquor, eggs, etc. We used often to request the woman to 'Sit with the god;' that is, to let the spirit come into her. Then we would ask questions—When father would return from the village whither he had gone?—What we ought to do to a certain enemy of ours?—How we could destroy him?—Who carried away certain things which we had lost?—Why we did not get a letter from some absent friend?—and the like. The answers which we received were not always truthful, yet we had the utmost confidence in the oracle.

"The method by which this woman summoned the spirit was very simple. She would let her hair fall loose—she was an unshaven widow,—and, joining her hands,

would place them against her forehead. With closed eyes and sighing breath she would remain motionless for awhile, then she would begin to rock to and fro, first holding her breath, then expelling it. Her hands rested upon her knees, her fingers next to her thumbs straightened out, the others tightly clenched within the palm. The spirits did not speak very much, save to reply to our questions; remaining silent unless questioned.

"Before the spirits came, the woman would burn incense or camphor, also burning camphor after the arrival of the spirits. Pouring some water into a drinking vessel, she would place a lighted wick of camphor on the water; then on all sides of the camphor she would drop grains of rice, or sift ashes; and, watching the various ways in which the bits of ashes or the kernels of rice clung to the wick, would interpret the answers to our questions. Sometimes she would put the leaves of the *nagvel* or snake-vine on the burning camphor, and would obtain answers to our questions from the manner in which the smoke arose—whether in a straight line or a crooked one. She would exclaim in this way:

"'Oh, there is a piece of paper in the path;' or 'the children are hiding under the tamarind tree,' etc. When the spirits left her they threw her on the ground. If another spirit was not to come, then we would sprinkle water on her, and she would soon be released from her possession; but if another one was expected she would sit upon a stool. When certain spirits were coming she would roll upon the ground; at the entrance of others she would rise and dance; and with others was obliged to hold a sword in her hand while dancing. If the spirit of a god came, then the widow would cover her forehead with a pigment and put flowers on her head; but when he left her she would throw them away.


"This possession by spirits and the various manifestations are quite common. At particular times we are obliged to make great preparations for them, and must bring fowls, goats, eggs, liquors, different kinds of sweetmeats, and many flowers and fragrant substances. We call this ceremony 'Filling the company.' Then many spirits coming, eat and drink and play—so we understand—carrying away a portion of the offering which we have placed before them. At the time of these entertainments we play upon different musical instruments. Seeing this sort of thing I would sometimes think how fine it would be if I too could be possessed; but this wish was not fulfilled so long as I remained in Belgaum.' *Arunodaya*, pp. 67, 68.

"I have mentioned in a former place that while we were living in Belgaum there used to be spiritual manifestations in our house, and how the wish was created within me that I, too, might become possessed. While in Bombay I had special opportunities for seeing these manifestations. The woman who used to come to our house at Belgaum also visited us at Bombay. So I began to see these works not only in this woman but also, among the devotees of Khandoba, and among our relatives, and in others. In Aden there did not many of these manifestations come under my notice, yet one boy in our home was sometimes possessed, and occasionally, as it was deemed proper, we would summon one or two men from without, in order to consult them. One of these men was a Kholapure Maratha, into whom came a '*pier*,' or spirit of a Mohammedan saint. Afterward I became possessed, not of a Hindu oracle, but of a Mohammedan '*pier*.' After being questioned he commanded us to go to Belgaum saying, 'I am from Belgaum. Go to my village; and this boy'—myself—'must go too.'

"Up to the time I left I was obliged to eat a portion of goat's flesh. When he entered into my body all the people of the household began to do him reverence, to pray to him, etc., and to ask him questions concerning our welfare. But he was very anxious to return. At last my sister fell very sick; she died after I left Aden, and I was sent to Belgaum. Together with my father, and one other man, early in 1849, I left Aden, by steamer for Bombay. We went by water to Belgaum, and stopped at the house of a relative. One night, having prepared everything according to the instructions of the spirit, we carried with us certain articles which he had specified, and placed them at midnight at the foot of a peepul tree—the sacred fig-banyan—some distance from the village. I was greatly frightened at that time. The night was dark; there were only two or three of us present, and when we returned, we could not see behind us. Hurrying home as fast as we could we bathed and entered the house.

"I have written about this according to my understanding of it as a Hindu,—without questioning its truth or falsehood. Since becoming a Christian, this madness—be it madness or be it a devil—*has gone entirely out of my head*. Jesus Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. He sets all those who take refuge in him *free from the evil works of darkness*. No other religion can do this."—*Arunodaya*, p. 111.

This is the statement of a Hindu medium still living; and the country is full of them. They are in all respects identical with the spirit mediums of Christendom. The 'progress' of spiritualism is backward into darkness, degradation and despair.

 This subject is to be continued in a Tract on *Necromancy*.